

In the Darkness Before the Dawn"

by Psychomorph

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Summary: A girl is caged as a slave on an alien world. A cage of her own making....

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DISCLAIMER As always, Animorphs ain't mine.

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>
It's hot out here, the sun beating down on my near bare back. The rags they gave us barely provide even the simulation of modesty. We've learned not to let it bother us. We've even learned to adapt, I suppose. I have to keep moving, have to keep harvesting the precious crystals. The methline crystals are all that really matter now. Look at this one, how it sparkles in the sunlight. It's beautiful. It's almost easy to keep looking at this and forget the alien world around me.

>
The Yeerks won. The Animorphs never really had a chance. It was easier at first, easier to speak of rebelling and escaping the slave ships. But it became so hard. You see, some of use were of no use to the Yeerks. Some of us were too dumb, or slow, or built wrong, or just plain too troublesome. They could be picky now. So many hosts. So many new lives they can exploit and use.

>
The methline crystal is so pretty, the sunlight just kind of soaks into it and dances around inside. Beautiful.

>
How much time has gone by? The main sun is lower in the sky. That happens sometimes. You can stare at the crystal and get lost in it. The others are glancing at me nervously now. They cover for me. They put some of their crystals in my basket. We do that. Your work group is your family. We all know that you can get lost in the methline crystals. We cover for each other when that happens. We all cover for each other.

>
The overseer is here now. He's looking into each basket. None meet the daily quota. All the others came really close, but they didn't quite meet that line in the basket that tells you when you can finally quit for the day. Mine's not even half full. Uh oh. We'll all

get punished now. We know that. We do.

>
He looks at me now. He know that the others covered for me, he can still see the dazzle of the methline crystal in my eyes. The others will still get punished for covering for me, but I will hurt the most. Oh yes. The overseer will make sure of that.

>
He's uncurling the energy whip now, the tendrals of stinging light snaking from the handle. The deadly glow of the whip splashes across his muzzle. He snarls at me. I scramble to the rock wall my group has been working on. My fingers claw at the stone behind me. A sharp shard of rock or bad crystal cuts into my back. I press harder against it. That small pain provides something else for me to focus on. Anything but the overseer standing in front of me.

>
"Losst in the pretty crysstal, little sslave?" His voice is a hiss. He has tried to drop the accent that marks his origin, but he never quite succeeds. The overseer's head drops down on his long, slender neck to peer at me. His hide is dark green with mottled blacks and light browns. Overlapping scales add pattern to the dull colors. That hide is hot and slick. I know this. I know this from the countless times I have been drugged and dragged into his quarters. I know the pull and play of hard muscle that could be felt if I placed my palm upon the overseer's flank.

>
I know all of this as well as I know my own rotting soul.

>
I don't know his species. He might be a mutated form of Hork-Bajir. Or a totally unique species in his own right. He hides that from me. The overseer, who has revealed so much to me in the darkness, hides that from even himself. Maybe he's ashamed. Ashamed of his origins, of where he comes. Better he should be ashamed for where he is now. But I suppose some shame is better than none in our new masters.

>
He runs a talon along my shoulder and neck. It comes to rest underneith my chin. His talons should have the heat of long dead bones left to rot in the sun. Instead, there is a terrible living heat to those claws. His talons don't shine in the light. They draw in the sunlight like the methline crystal, but they kill it. His talons and his eyes draw in the light and kill it.

>
"Losst again, weren't you?" The overseer's voice is warm and melodious. Even with the hiss. He jerks his talon down. It slices through the rags I had tied about my neck to keep the stinging sweat out of my shirt. The overseer's talon never touches my flesh. Not now. "Losst in the crysstal."

>
I am trying not to look at the whip. Better to look at him, to focus on him, than to think of what he will do. The fear is crushing, crashing down on me and squirming in my empty gut like maggots. I gag at the thought. The overseer brings the whip close to me. The tendrals of light slithering from the handle are bundled into loose loops. It doesn't hurt his palms. Not with his gloves. The whip crackles as it nears my skin. I try to swallow my fear. I fail. How can I succeed with that thing so close to me? The hair on my arms is standing up now, the whip is so close.

>
The overseer lets the loops of light fall free from his palm. His arm jerks back. This moment is always frozen. The moment before the pain strikes. The moment before the sun rises. The moment before another boot crushes into my chest. The moment before overseer gives me the stare that tells me I will be in his quarters that night. The moment my life has become trapped in.

>
The whip is poised in the air like a snake waiting to strike. It cuts through the air making a sharp whistling noise as it decends. I finally break from my paralysis and scream, drawing my arm before me to protect myself. The whip curls around my arm and burns into my

flesh. The overseer pushes a button that deactivates the energy whip. It vanishes.

>
The overseer stares at me, his eyes dark. I've gotten good at this. Taking my mind away from the pain. His eyes captivate me where the pain cannot. They peirce into me as the scent of my own burning flesh cannot. The trecherous watering of my mouth is the only reaction to that scent. It is the only reaction to the pain. I can't see myself reflected in his eyes. Nothing is reflected in those alien orbs.

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('He's never seen a unicorn!' some gibbering part of my mind screams.)

>
I've become very good at banishing the pain.

>
But I can't banish him.

>
His hand grips my chin, forcing my gaze up to his, no matter how I fight it. The overseer's lips pull back from his teeth in a snarl. "You will rot here. You will die here!" he spits at me. He drops his hand from me as though he cannot stand to touch me. His back is turned and he seems about to leave.

>
I crouch in the dirt and shiver. Blood flows freely from the wound on my arm. I stare at his departing form. His tail lashes. His rough uniform is matted with blood and dirt. Not my blood. My blood in on his soul. My blood is an obscene red against the darkness of him.

>
The sound of his claws cruching into the dirt and sand and rock halts abruptly. I hear the dull thud of his whip hitting the ground. I look up and see him running back. He lunges for me and pins me against the wall of the quarry. The overseer growls deep in his chest. His hands hold me pinned by the shoulders. I am lifted off of the ground by the force of him.

>
His voice is low and dangerous. His words are rushed. "You never fight, you never ressisst, every time you are beaten you hide within yourssself, you dig your grave deeper each time, you are weak because you make yourssself weak, you never fight me." The overseer's grip about my shoulders tightens. "You never fight me," he repeats. The last was said to himself, not me. He stares at me, as though seeing me for the first time. The overseer backs away from the wall of the quarry still gripping my shoulders. He throws me to the dirt before him.

>
I know I shiver and quake before him. I do not care. He will hurt me and he will leave. I will be taken to his chambers and I will be taken away from them. Others will beat me and starve me. I will feel more pain. I know this as well as I know him. But I do not care. That is how I banish the pain. By not feeling it in my soul.

>
The overseer looms over me. "You never fight me!" He says it louder. Now he roars. "FIGHT ME!" I lay in the dirt unfeeling. There is that moment again. That moment before the pain really starts. That moment where you know that there is no salvation. The overseer kneels and lifts me up, careful and almost delicate in his movements. He takes care not to jostle my injured arm. "You never fight me." I do not imagine the tone of despair to his words.

>
The overseer takes me away from the quarry and into his quarters. He bandages my arm and back. I am clothed and fed. His movements are gentle. I am laid upon something warm and soft to sleep and rest. I know in this time and place I fear him. But I also know that if we had met elsewhere and elsewhen, I could have loved him.

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Comments? Praises? Flames? Think I should continue the story? You know where to contact me.

End
file.